

A litmus test for caretaker government's cleansing actions

The newly industrialized countries (NICs) of Southeast Asia, including South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, China as well as Japan are constantly looking for low-wage countries to produce parts and components of their durable, intermediate and capital goods in a cost-effective manner. Bangladesh is being constantly approached by these countries to allow them to utilize the Bangladeshi reserve pool of semi-skilled and skilled labour.

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THERE are obvious questions on people's minds: should the caretaker government (CG) stay on longer and carry out the cleansing actions, or handover power after the scheduled election?

Currently, the CG appears to be reacting to the existing ills of the economy and society created by three classes of Bangladeshis: politicians, bureaucrats (civilian and military) and traders, who have so far held the development aspiration of the country hostage. The rent-seeking activities of these three classes are well-documented, and are identified as the major obstacle to Bangladesh's real economic development.

The actions by the CG may be characterized as a defensive move, and a mere "show," in the absence of a positive and concrete nation-building step taken in parallel. This step means taking an initiative for massive development of domestic production of durable and capital goods with significant local components, as well as local research and development (R&D).

The said initiative should be treated as a matter of national security and should be protected at any cost by the armed forces and other Bangladeshi national security apparatus.

It may be noted that all industrially developed countries, such as those in North America, Western Europe and Japan, etc., invariably identify a

cluster of important industrial complexes as integral parts of national security. The government protects these companies at any cost.

Furthermore, by definition, these nation-building initiatives should be independent of political party politics. No matter which party comes to power in future, it should protect these vital industries, exactly the way it is done in all developed countries.

For example, the US political parties, Democrats and Republicans alike, have the same view towards promoting and protecting important US industries vital for its national security.

People are asking themselves the question; where is the CG drawing its strength from, to undertake this cleansing initiative that dares to cross

all party lines, and who is really calling the shots? Who is the CG trying to impress if it is not carrying out necessary nation-building policies and programs?

A return to the status quo, without any nation-building steps, means a return to the same rent-seeking activities which enrich (a) the aforementioned three classes of Bangladeshis and (b) their accomplices – the industrially advanced countries.

The latter, with help from the former, must sell their high-priced goods in Bangladesh, and make sure that local competitor industries do not emerge and pose a threat to the corresponding industries in their respective home countries.

Thus, it becomes painfully clear that nation-building through establishment of domestic durable and capital goods industries is not in the best interest of this alliance.

As a matter of fact, the alliance would go to great lengths to secure uninterrupted influx of durable, intermediate and capital goods into Bangladesh, and at the same time use various means to destroy any aspiration on the part of any local

entrepreneur to engage in the production of these goods.

No country in the world can advance economically without producing durable, intermediate and capital goods domestically. The production of these goods can alone provide the "depth of individual productivity" that is needed for true nation-building.

In contrast, milk and egg selling, basket weaving, adult education, etc., the low-intensity economic activities undertaken and promoted by the non-government organizations (NGOs) engaged in Bangladesh, such as Grameen Bank, Brac, Gonoshastho Kendro, and so on, can only sustain subsistence-level national productivity, which is known to be only around \$1 daily per person.

The NGO activities not only limit individual productivity among the masses, but also hinder establishment of domestic durable, intermediate and capital goods industries. No one should have the illusion that NGOs will go beyond subsistence-level activities and become national building agents. By definition, they simply cannot.

There are two distinct possibilities in front of us to bring about real and significant increases in individual productivity and, thus, to build an economically prosperous Bangladesh. Either one, or both, can be undertaken.

Option 1: Bangladesh already possesses rudimentary capabilities to locally produce durable, intermediate and capital goods. However, the aforementioned alliance has systematically destroyed and/or suppressed these capabilities in order to protect the earnings from "economic rent" attainable through the importation of these categories of goods.

The means used to destroy/suppress local industries are (a) imposing unusually high taxes on raw materials needed to produce these goods, (b) depriving the local entrepreneurs of needed energy, capital and land, and (c) imposing negligible import taxes on these goods.

So, a true nationalistic/patriotic CG (or any patriotic politician) must do everything possible to get local production of these categories of goods underway. Thus, it should

allow them to utilize the Bangladeshi reserve pool of semi-skilled and skilled labour.

Since the domestic production of these parts and components does not serve the purpose of the three classes, they have so far prevented the entry of these countries into Bangladesh.

The ideal relationship between these countries and Bangladesh can take the form of the symbiotic relationship that existed between Malaysia and Japan. In this relationship, Malaysia adopted the so-called "look east" policy and started the production of parts and components of durable, intermediate and capital goods and, in the process, built vital local industries through technology diffusion.

The CG must initiate, and actually undertake, these policies and programs right away. Otherwise, the current crackdown would be meaningless, and certainly questionable.

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Women trafficking in Bangladesh

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YESTERDAY was International Women's Day. Every year we celebrate this day with lots of hope to change the world into a better place for discriminated, vulnerable women. But the days remain the same. In Bangladesh, women are victims of discrimination in different ways in every aspect of life in society.

Here, I want to discuss about women trafficking in Bangladesh because, nowadays, it is a very dangerous trend in society. A large number of women's lives have turned into hell because of this vicious practice.

Nari pachar, Bangla for trafficking of women, has been one of the most urgent human rights problems during recent years in Bangladesh. As many as fifty women and children are reportedly taken out of Bangladesh every day, and sold into forced prostitution, organ trade or slave labour.

Thousands of Asian men, women and children are being trafficked within, and across, borders annually. Bangladesh continues to face a significant internal and international trafficking problem.

Bangladesh is a source, and transit point, for men, women and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation, involuntary domestic servitude, child camel jockeying, and debt bondage. Women and children from Bangladesh are trafficked to India and Pakistan for sexual exploitation. Bangladeshi women migrate legally to the Gulf states – Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia – for work as domestic servants, but often find themselves in situations of involuntary servitude.

In addition, Bangladeshi boys are trafficked to the Gulf to serve as camel jockeys and as bonded labourers in the fishing industry. Women and girls from rural areas are trafficked internally for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. Burmese women are trafficked through Bangladesh to India for sexual exploitation.

Female migration has, consequently, been pushed underground and has become an illegal practise. This policy restricting female migration is remarkable, given the fact that Bangladesh is a labour-exporting

nation. It is one of the densest populated countries in the world, and the remittance that the migrant workers send home is a large source of income for the country.

Over the last decade, 200,000 Bangladeshi girls were lured under false promises and sold to the sex industry in nations including Pakistan, India and the Middle East.

A non-government source reports that about 200,000 women and children have been trafficked to the Middle East in the last 20 years. Different human rights activists and agencies estimate that 200-400 young women and children are smuggled out every month, most of them from Bangladesh to Pakistan.

The Indian Social Welfare Board estimates that there are 500,000 foreign prostitutes in India, 1% of whom are from Bangladesh, and 2.7% of prostitutes in Kolkata are from Bangladesh (Bangladesh Cedaw Report).

Every day, over 50 women and children are trafficked out of Bangladesh through the border areas. 500 Bangladeshi women are illegally transported into Pakistan every day. (Press Statement, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association).

Now we can understand what a devastating picture it is! In Bangladesh, the collection points for trafficked women are usually far from the border points. Women rescued in Dinajpur (in the north) were from Cox's Bazar (in the south). Girls from the southern part of Bangladesh are usually trafficked across the northern borders.

In Kushtia area, some villages are used as stations for the traffickers. The Rajshahi border villages Bidirpur and Premtali are used because there are fewer checkpoints. Jessore border is very popular with traffickers.

Traffickers use 20 main points in 16 western districts near the Indian border. The main trafficking route is Dhaka-Mumbai-Karachi-Dubai. Many of the victims end up in Middle East nations.

Female migration is larger and more varied than in the trafficking scenario. Often the rigid concept exists that migratory movement takes place predominantly under coercion, or when women lose control and other people take advantage of them, whereas this is not

always the fact.

While the risks of exploitation are considerable, the earnings women make abroad are impressive as well. Many female migrant workers have returned to Bangladesh with substantial savings, an enhanced sense of well-being and greater confidence in their ability to take decisions and cope autonomously.

Most often, people's perception is that trafficked girls are kidnapped and taken away from their homes completely against their will. Although this sometimes happens, in most of the cases a girl will decide to go along with the trafficker herself, or under pressure from her family.

Traffickers will look for girls from poor and vulnerable families in villages, and tempt them and their parents with offers of lucrative jobs, a good marriage or a comfortable life in neighbouring countries. Only when they have taken her over the border and to her final destination will she find out what kind of circumstances she will be forced to work in.

If we go through the causes of trafficking, we can realise that they are rooted in the very depths of our society. Here I am showing a few causes, such as pseudo-marriage, dowry demand, unequal power relations, and discrimination in the family by gender and age, negligible decision-making status of women in financial matters, negative attitude toward women and female children, social stigma against single, unwed and widowed women, misinterpretation of religion regarding women, religious fundamentalism, complications out of conditionality and fraudulent practices in marriages/after marriages, child marriage, polygamy, or incompatible marriages, easy divorce, frustration in love and failure in conjugal life, enticements for better life, e.g. job and prospect of marriage, increased dependency of guardians on the income of their female children, natural disasters making families homeless and disintegrated, acute poverty forcing parents to abandon their children, lack of shelter for women in distress, inefficiency of the law-enforcing agency, and women being released from jail/hazat are given to guardians/custodians without proper/legal verification.

Bangladesh should assign greater priority and resources to its law enforcement response to trafficking. Prevention programmes must

address factors that increase the vulnerability of migrants or potential migrants, such as poverty, and discrimination on the basis of class, ethnicity and gender.

Trafficking and migration are inter-linked. Anti-trafficking organisations and organisations working on all aspects of migration can collaborate in designing programs, and researching and strategising to achieve safer migration.

Prevention of trafficking requires cooperation and support between governments, inter-governmental organisations, NGOs, local communities and the migrants themselves, and between countries of origin, transit and destination. Government of country must take responsibility for their citizens, both at home and abroad. Destination country governments should promote just and decent working conditions for all workers, including migrant workers, whether documented or undocumented.

Upazila Parishad introduced in 1982:

With the promulgation of Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinance, 1982 (LIX of 1982), there was a ray of hope that the local level administration might find an administration to satisfy the expectations of the public at large.

In 1985, people observed a direct election for Upazila chairman, creating a scenario of emerging as desired. Thana Nirbhahi Officers, posted at different Upazila in phases, were successful in generating a sense of awareness in favour of strong local government.

The Ordinance of 1982 envisaged a few transferred subjects to the Upazila Parishad, such as health and family welfare, primary education, rural development and cooperatives, rural infrastructure, fisheries and livestock etc.

At the same time, there were a few subjects retained by the center, like civil and criminal judiciary, central revenue etc. The people in rural areas were getting acquainted with system, of course, sometimes demanding certain changes in the procedure, especially in the judi-

ciary.

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UPAZILA Parishad election, to be or not to be, is a widely discussed issue across the country. Political activists and social workers at the Upazila level are frequently asking the question about the possibility of Upazila election. Some people are, in fact, anxious to establish themselves as political leaders, or as persons to reckon with, at the Upazila level.

On the other hand, civil society organizations and think-tanks of the nation strongly feel the urgency of strengthening local govt. at the Upazila level, prior to the parliamentary election. They believe that the elected representatives at grass-roots level will be a competent and appropriate authority to ensure good governance, dispense justice and accelerate progress, with adequate accountability and transparency in performance.

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ciary.

Suspension of activities of the Parishad:

The activities of the Upazila Parishad were suspended in 1991. In fact, the then government abolished the Upazila system lock, stock and barrel. It was like throwing the baby out with the bath water.

It was not a decision with enough thought or specific vision, supported with in-depth feasibility study, to present to the nation an appropriate local government. It was perhaps, the result of Upazila Parishad elections in 1985, where supporters of president Ershad occupied around 200 seats.

Since then, confusion continued in the political circles about the election for Upazila Parishad, and its necessity for modifying the organizational structure into one appropriate for the country. Of course, the Upazila Parishad Act, 1988, clearly indicated the election of public representatives as the way for effective management of the local government. Similarly, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on April 5, 2005, strongly recommended reintroduction of the Upazila Parishad for strengthening the local government system in the country.

Upazila Parishad: Why?

It is a well-known fact that the members of parliament do not even attend the parliament regularly, not to speak of their contributions in law making for the welfare of the nation. A study of the Transparency International revealed how some members of parliament failed to deliberate in the parliament, and did not involve themselves in the process of lawmaking, their primary obligation.

This has resulted in losses for the exchequer also. Some observers believe that the election to the Upazila Parishad might bring some benefits to the nation, and help develop a system to streamline public life and bring some discipline and decorum. The election to the Upazila will prompt local level politicians to engage themselves in some activities, and demonstrate

their sagacity and tenacity.

On the other hand, persons with experience and intellectual background representing the civil society will get the scope to occupy a place in the parliament and involve themselves in framing Acts and Ordinances appropriate to the genius of the nation and requirement of the country.

The elected chairman, by virtue of his position, will be responsible for looking into the affairs of the Upazila, like health services delivery system, primary education, agriculture, fisheries and livestock, forestry and environment. The Parishad can effectively monitor law and order, overview trade and industry, identify traffickers, hoarders, and can control the criminals.

Local level planning is possible only when the Upazila can operate effectively. The rapid urbanization, as observed, is due to the massive migration of the rural population to the capital, and the big cities, for employment, education and social security.

Experience of the past:

In 1983, thana training and development centers of the country suddenly became the hub of planning and development with the posting of senior magistrates as Thana Nirbhahi Officers. A few substantial impediments were identified. They are as follows:

- Political pressure from members of the parliament for each project and program appeared as disincentive for the TNO to act independently.
- The lack of transparency in the Upazila elections, due to unwanted influence from the chairman in power.
- The difference of opinion between TNO and the chairman, creating a bottleneck in the normal administration.
- The frequent transfers and posting of Thana level officers
- The interference in the magistracy and the judiciary functioning at the Upazila level sharply eroded the confidence of the public.
- The reluctance of lawyers to move to the Upazila for trying

cases created a major hurdle to quick dispensing of justice.

Time is right now.

Most of the drawbacks are no more in existence with the improvement in our administration system and revolution in our telecommunication network. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on April 5, 2005, specifically recommended the reintroduction of the Upazila system.

A strong local government is indispensable for ensuring sustainable development, achieving the targets of poverty alleviation, attaining the targets of millennium development goals by 2015, and developing democratic institutions in the country. It is possible only when accountable local governance, through decentralization of functions and powers to local institutions, acts with the confidence of the public at large.

The Upazila, as the center of power, can play a significant role in planning and implementing need-based development projects for poverty alleviation and reduction of socio-economic inequality. Unfortunately, all the governments of the country used the local bodies to strengthen their own political bases in rural areas.

Consequently, the primary objectives of poverty reduction, economic equity, gender balance, justice to the distressed and deprived, protection of minorities from oppression, distribution of land to the landless farmers, have remained unattended and unfulfilled. This might help to make the electoral roll more acceptable.

This is high time to pull the trigger for a fair and free election, and establish a strong local government with the election of Upazila Parishad prior to the 9th National Assembly.

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Who should foot the bill on climate change?

To be sure, Stern is concerned with development in the near term and not only a century and beyond into the future. But in the report's postscript, he argues that these concerns can be met by pledges given by the rich countries to increase development assistance. Perhaps they can be. But these two aspects of the climate problem -- mitigation and adaptation -- cannot be separated from each other and need to be determined jointly.

SCOTT BARRETT

AS the human influence in changing the global climate has become clearer, identifying who should take the lead with action has become murkier.

While the rich countries are responsible for the historic buildup in the stock of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, developing countries are increasingly responsible for the growth in emissions. They will also be the most affected by climate change. At the same time, these countries face a pressing need to raise their standard of living.

So, which countries should act, and how?

The so-called Berlin Mandate, agreed to in 1995 by parties to the UN Framework Convention on

Climate Change, said that the developed countries should reduce their emissions first; developing countries should do so later. It is for this reason that the Kyoto Protocol imposes emission constraints on the EU and Japan, but not China and India.

The logic of the Berlin Mandate was that the developing countries should be allowed to "catch up" to the rich countries and then reduce emissions. The developed countries, by contrast, had a responsibility to lead in reducing their emissions, since they were largely responsible for the rise in atmospheric concentrations. Morally, this may make sense. From the perspective of reducing emissions, however, the Berlin Mandate got the order exactly wrong.

Another problem with the Kyoto Protocol is that it focuses on the short term. It asks just a small number of industrialized countries to reduce their emissions by a bit between 2008 and 2012. It does not ask for deeper reductions or require action after 2012.

It is more important to reduce emissions substantially in the longer term than to reduce them marginally in the short term. To reduce emissions substantially in the long run, however, requires fundamentally new technologies. These need to be invented, developed and then diffused globally.

The fast-growing developing countries should transition to new technologies as a priority; they should be given incentives not to develop as the industrialized countries have

done. China brings a new coal-fired electricity plant on line every week, plants that last 40 years or more.

If developing countries like China continue to develop as the rich countries have done, by relying on carbon-based fuels, then greenhouse-gas concentrations will continue to rise for many decades.

The industrialized countries, by contrast, should embrace the new technologies gradually, as their installed base of carbon-intensive capital depreciates. This may not seem fair, but it is the cost-effective way to reduce global emissions--and emissions will have to be reduced cost-effectively if they are to be reduced substantially.

Fairness can be addressed another way. The industrialized countries can simply help pay for the costs of transitioning developing countries onto a new, low-carbon development path.

The climate conference held in Nairobi in November 2006 highlighted how developing countries are especially vulnerable to climate change. Most are located in the lower latitudes and are already "too warm." Agriculture as a share of national income is much higher in the poor

countries than in the rich.

Finally, poor countries tend to have weak institutions and are thus less able to adapt to climate change.

Adaptation is essential because no matter how much is done to reduce emissions, the climate is sure to change. The common view about adaptation is that it is a reactive policy -- Dikes should be built higher as the seas rise; crops should be shifted as the temperatures rise or rainfall increases or decreases, and so on.

But adaptation needs to be thought of more broadly. The focus in the near term should be on making developing countries resilient to climate change.

Climate change is expected to increase malaria prevalence in the future, mainly by expanding the range of the mosquito vector in higher elevations. Malaria prevalence might increase by 5 percent over the next century because of climate change. Mitigation could reduce this increase only a bit.

By contrast, R&D to discover and develop a malaria vaccine can reduce malaria prevalence across-the-board. Such an investment would help poor countries today and not only a century from now, which is

when substantial mitigation undertaken mid-century is most likely to have its effect.

The example of the malaria vaccine is best thought of as a metaphor for the kind of development that's needed. So is R&D to raise agricultural productivity in the poorest countries -- a "green revolution" for Africa.

Of course, technologies such as these have been needed for a long time. The difference is the motivation for rich countries to help supply them. The motivation is not only compassion.

Since the rich countries are responsible for the buildup in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, they bear an obligation to help poor countries to adapt.

How should society balance mitigation and adaptation? The Stern Review on the economics of climate change emphasizes the need for "strong early action" to reduce emissions.

This recommendation follows from Sir Nicholas Stern's ethical perspective. He argues that climate-change damages avoided a century and more from now ought to count almost as if they could be avoided today.

This concern for the future is reflected in what economists call the "discount rate." A high value favors investments with a quicker pay back. A low value favors investments that pay back in the more distant future. Stern uses a low discount rate.

His main concern lies with the developing countries, which will be hardest hit by climate change. Expressing concern about equity, Stern argues that the rich countries ought to reduce global emissions substantially today to help today's poor countries in the future.

By Stern's own calculations, however, today's poor countries will have a higher standard of living in the future, when climate change hits, than they do today. He therefore advocates both that today's rich countries assist the poor in the future and that today's relatively poor generation help tomorrow's more prosperous generation.

A problem arises because in Stern's model -- as in all economic models of climate change -- the only way in which rich countries can assist the poor is by reducing their emissions, yet the effect takes decades to materialize. To justify a substantial level of assistance, Stern gives a higher weight to the future with a low

discount rate.

To be sure, Stern is concerned with development in the near term and not only a century and beyond into the future. But in the report's postscript, he argues that these concerns can be met by pledges given by the rich countries to increase development assistance. Perhaps they can be. But these two aspects of the climate problem -- mitigation and adaptation -- cannot be separated from each other and need to be determined jointly.

The priorities in the short term should be both to enhance the resilience of the most vulnerable states to climate change and to undertake the necessary R&D to discover new technologies that will ultimately reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases.

Emissions should also be reduced in the short term, but a policy that focuses exclusively on near-term emission reductions will fail to address the major challenges posed by global climate change.

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